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Idiosynchronicity

A Collection of Poetry

by

Chris Kehoe

**A Creative Writing Project submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
through the Department of English in partial fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of Windsor.**

**Windsor, Ontario, Canada
1998**

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Approved: Alistair MacLeod
A Brandt
J. Th. ill

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for Krista

Play this book backwards
with your finger
spin it until the tracks
form a spiral
your needle eyes
shrink into.
Feel your finger print erase
smudge ink words to notes
ride the smooth revolutions of pages
in your head.

Family Tree

Family Tree

If you could weigh roots
count their tributaries
measure extensions
depth below soil
evaluate the anchor's strength
distribution of weight
without using instruments
you would see
underground
equal flowers to branches.

Wood Carving

He envisioned a flawless
miniature loon
carved in wood.
Dedicated his evenings
to perfection.

Found primitive materials:
 sharp edge
 of split stone,
 pointed tooth yanked from dead
 black bear's mouth,
 smooth round section of birch wood
 with bark peeled.

He squatted at sundown
beside a fire
on the edge of a still
lake.
Held the day's piece firmly
began etching
paused

 tried to remember
 density of plumage
 neck's curvature
 length of beak
 dimensions.

Wanted all
done to scale.

 Same musical loon's cry
 that seduced naked swimmers into fondling
 rang in his ears,
 broke concentration.

 Agitated, his chiselling hand shook
 could no longer receive information
 from his brain,
 carving changed into the shape
 of his hands.

He spat on every flawed piece
threw each in fire
all that remained
life's efforts
pile of ash.

Open Prairie

Colonel Custer pried
open the West
with a rifle butt
smashed the gate handle
jammed his foot in.

Saved bullets by shooting
only through the heads of sleeping men
who were probably dreaming.
Women awakened, raped by government
soldiers
bayonets slid in and out,
babies shaken
by the sound of mom
 crying toothless mouths
 crushed under gun butts,
 spines cracked by finely polished boot heels.

Buffalo herded
into piles
sun-bleached skulls became flower pots
for weeds.

One bull sat strong
spread Custer on the prairie
then fled
 over carpets of grass
 corridors of streams
 paintings of breezes
 ceilings of sky
 never going to or leaving
 home.

An Almost History

It was the end
of the underground rail road,
but not officially.
Tecumseh
fought at the forks of McGregor and Thames,
but died down river.
Simcoe nearly made it the capital.
We are convinced history happened
somewhere else.

In Chatham
our surviving heroes
fought with the Essex and Kent Scottish
in Europe.
We can still hear barstool war stories
Saturday afternoons
harmonize like bagpipes
squeezed from vocal chords and the heart
over legion hall draft.

Photo From Paris

There is a picture
of my great grand uncle
sprawling back in a chair
drunk and still slurping
from a mug the size of his head
 hoisting cheers to the camera
 a trophy he can't keep
 from his only good time in Europe.

Commanding officer offered the infantry
(more than once)
a free weekend in Paris.
Challenge accepted,
had to bring ammunition
on three mules
through two kilometres of muck.
Loaded saddlebags of explosives
strapped harnesses around their necks
and dragged
 sank in mud to the knees
 trudged with boots heavy as shells
 prayed between cusses
 "Please God, don' let those stubborn ass
 mules get hit by no sniper.
 Don' let 'em get blown back to Queen's country,
 I ain' in no mood to get no n'other mule.
 Please God, don' let no bullet hit them
 explosives nor ping me in the head
 good night,"

Trip took a full
day
Paris was still there
caked on his face,
squishing in wet socks.

ii

Ammo unloaded in seconds
he removed a revolver
shot each mule square between the eyes
 bullets were obstinate
 insisted on exploding in their skulls

splashing brains
into mud
where they sank for the last time.
Walk back
was a quick couple hours.

Between the Eiffel tower,
a hot bath
and his twenty third beer
he managed time
for a picture.

Phantom Itch

He'd pretend
to catch their noses and keep them,
pull his finger off and make it wiggle
in his other hand,
let the kids tug at his beard.
Loved playing with the grandchildren
he fought for.

"Scratch my leg"
he said between war stories,
they giggled
as fingertips tapped his plastic
prosthesis through polyester.

On Memorial Day
told them he lost it at Dieppe
from a land mine that sent him flying.
July 1st
he was with his crew,
starving in a bunker on the Italian border,
they needed food.
Victoria Day,
said that while sleeping
his leg rolled in a campfire,
nearly burnt his bum.

They laughed every time.

When the grandchildren got older, noticed
he'd swallow and bite his lower lip,
grab at his stub
the phantom itch was like his memories,
made him grimace from a place
no one could touch.

Edge of Town

Every time we drove
into my grandparents'
driveway
my mother told how the land
behind the back fence
used to be a farmer's field
where soy beans grew in summer;
snow drifted in winter
 sometimes a thin black layer of soot
 would settle on the snow
 from a sugar factory down the street
 that no longer exists (in her memories, the black coating
 was beautiful).
"Right here, the middle
of the city,
used to be the edge of town" she'd say,
then shift into park.

The old neighbourhood complained
over tea and bridge
about "the kids" moving in,
as newly constructed pools
splashed chlorine into English
rose gardens.
"Those people learned about skunks too late"
someone said in between hands
"robins and blue jays
don't stop at the bird feeders
cause of all this mayhem."
 One player took a peek between back window curtains
 to admire the azaleas
 crushed
 into soil by workers
 while erecting
 reinforced wooden fences around the block.

Sunset comes earlier now,
sinks into the right angled corner of the "backyard house"
(where the field used to be)
reappears at the side
(where a shade-tree used to be)
then cuts perfectly along the fence top
as the invading black
settles across the yard.

I once heard a native legend
that claimed the field
used to be full
of trees
no streets had been cleared
and the town was without a name.
Snow fell and settled
never turning black,
no such thing as the middle or edge
of land.

Early July

On tranquil nights in early July
you can hear corn grow.
Shoots pop,
an entire field creaks -
barn door
in a breeze.

People
don't make these sounds
until after
they've grown.
Bowels squeeze and flutter,
bones crack -
wooden chair rocking
on the farmhouse porch.

War Vet to His Daughter

Juggling the last eighty years
I realize the complications
of my disease
strike each off randomly
 my tracers traced me
 stones crashed through my eyes
 in the dark
 my helmet rang like the inside of a church
 bell,
 my buddy collapsed
 beside me
 his ring
 hand brushed my belt
 loop
 could have made it
 if his legs hadn't shrivelled
 into wet kleenex
 peat hadn't clotted
 his head.

Our progress only a few
yards, for miles the Rhine
desert.
We shot uniforms,
our unknown enemy
for children we might not have.
To our side we were heroes.

ii

Cancer ambushed my lungs.
I lie in a white room under white sheets
stare empty faced at ceiling
try to keep my eyes off life-
sustaining monitors.
Wish I could speak
then you would know
 though my ribs dent through onion skin
 weak hands shake and spill cups of water
 cheeks suck into my mouth
 I am happy to die
 an older hero.

Family Funerals

When my father's uncle Frank died
he was cremated,
swept into an urn
then funnelled
into a shot
gun shell and fired
into the sky above Mitchell's Bay
 his brothers pulled the trigger at dawn,
 part of him rode on
 the same air current as the ducks he'd shoot (they were praying to themselves
 he'd hit one).
 No one saw how the bullet toppled when it peaked
 in the sky,
 or where in the water it pierced, then sank from the sun like a jewel.

A few years later
his uncle Harry's heart stopped
while trimming hedges in the back yard.
Gave him
a wake
 they danced till morning,
 stumbling before his corpse.
 Poured whisky at his
 pinned smile
 until make-up smeared on shirt collar
 like bacon grease.

Grandpa Jack died in a hospital;
 slow violin music
 ironed suits and war
 vets
 one had half an ear
 that looked like a tonsil
 lost it in Europe in the early 40s
 to a bullet
 he didn't hear.
 Buddies from Union Gas
 and Manitoulin travelled
 through snowstorms
 to the quiet hum of a funeral home furnace.
Uncle Alex relayed these stories of his only brothers
after the memorial service,
told of his hurt
as if it were opinion.

Welcome Fog

Fifty years
she'd sleep insulated
under his blanket arm
feet rubbing unspoken rhythms
bodies massaging together
as if floating in balm.
After his death
her bed became a solid slab of ice.

Her dreams, only winter settings,
indiscriminate snow
crosses the plains of her mind
drifts against fences,
buries.

She sits at night
on the edge of her bed
shivers
as freon flows through her veins
gazes through frost
at moonlit silhouettes.
Her mind colours
black shapes
fills
picture frames with wedding photos
end tables with empty wine glasses.

Visions kindle her eyes
a tear swells like a smile
inspires thaw.
She pulls back covers
lies in welcome fog
dreams of sunlight.

Needlewoman

Blotched skin draped
off her face
folded over grey eyes
 that were dull and flat
 circles
 like wooden buttons on a sweater
 (they did not give back
 my reflection).

She sat among her crocheted
creations, dozens of unused pillows
tiny sweaters for dogs,
toques, mitts,
ten years worth
of blankets.

 The variety of coloured yarns
 altered the size of her room,
 knitted patterns, created optical
 illusions
 squares twisted into diamonds,
 dots appeared in the middle,
 straight lines rolled into waves,
 shapes swelled and deflated
 our breathing space
 like lungs.

Her gaunt frame supported
precise corners
that pointed from under the blanket
like crochet needles in a bag
of yarn.

ii

Her voice clotted and choked
out syllables,
you could hear air suck through
phlegm pools in her throat
during vowel sounds.

 She was there for cancer
 of the larynx
 I was there with three classmates
 to talk to the dying,
 part of community service.
 After her crackled greeting
 they bolted out the door

down a polished corridor
with their eyes tunnelled
toward the exit.
She coughed up stories
in patterns
fed me one hook at a time
told about the messy gel
in her purple newborn's hair;
her husband's shaky hand-writing
smeared across his letters,
telling her all was well
at the front;
a dew drop
moon-glistening
in the corner of a spider's web
during an evening kill.
Her yarns spun around me
with the knitted precision
of a cocoon.

Her Museum

My grandmother's house is a museum,
her ghost will tell stories
if you listen intently to details
in floor squeaks,
examine how dust settled,
observe height of fingerprints on walls and doors.

i

"The back entrance
is at the side of the house.
Shoes piled here for over fifty years
as more children were born
 six pairs of girls shoes
 decreased in size down the hall
 mixed up in the middle,
 younger ones caught the oldest,
 got pretty hard to tell
 who the pairs belonged to.
A set of boys runners
covered with mud and holes
were usually scattered somewhere,
no wonder socks were always dirty.
These shoes grew
into sons in-laws,
18 grand children
and one great one.

I am still waiting.

ii

Here is the kitchen, walk in
and you'd be working.
I fed generations,
fogged windows
hundreds of times
with steam from oven roasted turkey,
stove cooked gravy,
boiled potatoes.
From the table you could hear the house; music
conversation and aroma for each season.

iii

Den
renamed the T.V. room
in 1963.
Carpet changed four times,
furniture eight
 newspaper basket stayed,
 carried World War,
 a baby boom,
 men on the moon,
 half century of Stanley cups,
 ten Prime Ministers.

iv

Watch your step on the way to the living room,
it is sunken.

The piano was bought for a good
price from a friend
before we could afford sofas.
Had the top cut off to make it
look modern, would have bought something better
but we liked the tone of this one.
Between heavy chords, a crackling fire and the glow of wine,
room shone like a Christmas tree.
Everyone present
was a light.

v

Upstairs there is a bathroom and three bedrooms
please do not proceed
beyond this point.

Oceanwomen

Her face was a shell
when wind blew through her cheeks
you could hear ocean,
perceive waves in her eyes.
On her back porch
 water broke.
Gradually shifted shoreline sand
sifted grain by grain into new beaches.

ii

Her daughter returned
home
walked on the strand sowing
footprints.
Her naked body slowly slid
into the lapping ocean.
Effervescent water swirled through toes,
spread around her ankles,
foamed up smooth legs,
splashed against rising breasts,
sprayed between shoulder blades.

Arms tread smoothly through blue,
eyes rippled with sunlight.

Children and Weeds

Children and Weeds

My time spent de-
liberating
to keep the weeds
down
define their space
 they advance through trenches
 shoot over fences
 spiral to the sky
 and grin
 like prevention was a vitamin.

My photo-
synthetic vision
used to con-
form to the green-
house
pre-
conception.

If not for May colours
 stinging yellows
 mellow purples
 ripening reds
 sweet and wild
 waving and smiling
 in an ocean of green
I would have sprayed
poison.

Evening in the Country

Covers zip-locked tight to chin
sounds seep through walls
like cool drafts-
threatening
to slip through cracks
in the comforter
like a stranger's
iced hand
along fine hairs
on the back
of his leg.

He stares at ceiling shadows
projected by a glowing moon
through naked branches
 long and crooked fingers
 fanned in all directions
 poised to tear

Black shapes
animated by wind
spread tightly
down walls
along the closet door
to carpet
out of sight.

Not
out of his mind.

Branches grow
up through mattress
strap around limbs
slither through sleeve openings.
He squirms for more
covers
aims for white spaces
between shadows
searching for light
sleep
or morning.

The Cellar

Two doors
in a mound of dirt
led underground.
Hinges squeaked as I heaved
open rotting wooden doors
to wet staircase
 cobwebs hung like curtains,
 I peeled them
 back to smell mildew.

My body blocked sunlight,
all I could see was shadow
 shifted sideways
 to let light in
 on more spider webs,
 ghosts of dust swirling.
At the bottom there were shelves
with jars
 little onions
 looked like milky eyeballs,
 pickled pigs feet
 resembled fingerless babies hands,
 red sauces
 I wanted to be blood.

Heard footsteps
so I hid between a shelf
and a bag
of spuds
 could feel potato-tentacles
 tie shoelaces together,
 eyes burned at me,
 palms squeaked against glass,
 the wet floor started to rise,
 blood was everywhere.

My grandfather's keys rattled
like chains
as he grumbled in a mummified voice
"someone left the damn doors open."
Coughed with a snicker
before he closed them
slid the key in and turned.

The Trap

We found my neighbour's cat
caught
in a rusty rat trap
beneath the Bar-B-Que
in our backyard
 neck snapped
 side twisted flat on pavement
 body left a wet spot
 when we moved it
 to a bag.

Brother found the contraption
behind a bar and grill,
set it up in case
rodents decided to visit
that summer.

On Ice

Jersey yanked
over my head,
jerked tight against my face,
 ripped a cut
 under my earlobe,
 fabric burned a spot off my chin with friction
 as if I had slid across carpet
 on my face.

Blind folded,
I felt the solid bat of a fist
viciously hammer my squirming head
 blood from my cracked nose
 drained into my mouth
 like warm beer.

Heard the crowd cheer
against me
because I was in the wrong
uniform
 back wrenched into spasm
 writhing in violent climax,
 managed to punch the side of his
 helmet
 broke two knuckles
 as my body buckled
 into a hockey bag
 on ice.

Reflections on Fishing

Spear fishing
at the creek,
I waded through weeds along the bank
staring sharply
through the thin film of green
settled on water
 moved in a slow creep,
 created my chance
 to be quick.

Spotted
a cat fish
I did not intend to eat
stirring along the bottom
in a trail of murk.

Spear spiked smoothly into the drink
crushed the spine and ripped the belly out.
Blood and pieces of flesh steeped
as furtive farm cats silently crept on the bank.

 During the quick
 attack

 I saw a face in the water
 that wasn't mine.

 Eyebrows clenched above the nose like fists,
 lips dark blue and rippled
 curled back, my gums
 pushed through with fangs that caged
 a red tongue.

 The spaces where my eyes should have been
 burned hot white.

I thought of old men on the dock
baking their faces in the sun,
smoking cigarettes and drinking whisky out of ginger-ale bottles
beside a pail of floating perch.
They catch their calm expression distorted in the broad side of fishing-
 knives, as the blade sinks between the eyes of a sheep-head
 like an extended thumbnail,
 to collect the lettered stones.

Metamorphosis (for Krista)

Washed from Lake Erie waves
was a tree trunk turned rock
 we sat together
 before we knew each other
 felt air blow through our stomachs
 your hair went hang gliding to the moon
 my hand on your knee was a lapping
 wave.

Dandelions in Dirt

Naked, we picked dandelions
smeared yellow
on each other's chests
to preserve the moment in bronze
 a river of blue veins in your breast
 swelled into branches against skin
 I climbed them with my tongue
 as if searching for apples.

We dug
with backs and feet
buried ourselves
in dirt
up to the nipples
our legs spun together like roots
you tickled my shoulders with eye lash petals.

We wondered why pushing daisies refers to death
watched white clouds shape shift
through faces of people we know
memorized the galaxy
of film on our eyes
as tree shadows slowly spun
into twilight.

An Image of Us

My pen did not come with
a well
of fluid lines
for you.

Instead, ink blobs
on the page
when I pause to think.

 In that pool
 is an image of us,
 hanging in fibres of paper,
 hiding from the rest
 of the poem.

Silent Visitors

Mid-morning sun beams
through the centre of living
room curtains,
floods a photograph
of the sister I will never know
 she emerges
 a volcano of fall colours
 brown ringlets and red overalls
 ornamented with autumn leaves.
Her smile speaks like a dream
teeth glow night-
lite soft
even mellow water spreads
into clouds
 photo pressed tight beneath glass
 a flattened rose between book leaves
 my diary hides the shakes
 of a bald-headed four year old
 vomiting barium
 shrinking to the result
 of failed chemotherapy.
I visit this photograph alone
notice dust disturbed
by an earlier visitor
swirling in a whirlpool
of window light.

Homeless

Homeless

At night he lingered
outside a Chinese restaurant on Queen,
ate rice and cold soup out of styrofoam
considered himself lucky
if there was a used napkin
half covered in rice,
at least he could brush
green onion bits from a wiry beard.
When he wasn't looking,
kitchen staff threw garbage bags
where he was squatting
fortune cookies and szechuan shrimp
in cracks between concrete
under the fence.
He received kicks while dreaming.

ii

Told me
his story
when I stopped for directions
to my hotel.
Talked about selling his house,
quitting work
to comfort his three-year old daughter
through her last months of leukemia,
how he knew of a great way
to get where I was going,
she slept softly
and tears came from everywhere,
you just turn left around the corner
cut through the park,
stayed in the waiting room
read every mag in the place,
somehow now is better.

Number Five Story

The early evening edition's
number five story
was something
about a young boy
struck by a stray
piece of lead
that smashed his t.v. room window
left a messy blast in his back
while watching cartoons
 his mother probably came home
 with two loaves of bread and a carton
 of milk which she dropped
 upon discovery.
The burst of fresh white
may have mixed with the stale blood and dried
coating her entire space pinkish brown
like a nipple.
Television footage was terrible,
all they showed was a reporter
holding a microphone as if it were ice cream
standing along yellow
caution tape
talking to neighbours
who didn't see anything
as police put pieces of the neighbourhood
into plastic baggies and labelled them with numbers.
Behind the news person was a tree with an empty
swing, rooted in front of a slanted porch hanging
from a small house.
Curtains spread and flapped like ghosts
as gusts hummed through the broken window.
 No answers in there,
 only shards of questions
 that slice tiny holes in finger
 prints
 while pinching shrapnel from the rug, couch and walls.
Blood stains the glass upon contact
but each tainted piece is saved.
Even if the window is reconstructed
with the dexterous care of a mother
the view will never be clear.

Sole-prints

On the shoulder of Highway 40
was a parked O.P.P. van
in front were tire tracks
dug in the shoulder,
water filled empty ruts
after two nights rain
mom reduced speed to take a look,
I saw my curious face
mirrored in a puddle
made by a shoe.
Footprints went around front of tire tracks
into the field.

Six men in police jackets
walked through a farmer's field
hunched over,
traced sole-prints
in search of something.

A mother's voice shrieked
over CBC radio
begging for the safe return
of her fifteen year old daughter
who was last seen walking home
from a babysitting job
officers already knew
where to look.
It was just a matter of
paces
to the woods
where the killer buries every-
body.

My mother slowed then sped,
with an open hand slapped
radio off.

Blazing After Cremation

I want to snort your cocaine ashes
smear you on my body and dance
through fire with a drum,
my ancient ceremony.

II

I
reflect in the gloss of your urn
create swirls on my palette with ashes
brush stories of us on the vase
with stolen strands of your hair.
Colours begin fresh
fade into permanence
 this is where we will meet
 between the shades of drying colours.
I paint pictures of severed pillars
great temples with weeds sprouting
through cracks
memories of our old empire.

III

I need you
to haunt me
imply rhythms while you blaze,
guide me through soul.

Plastic Surgery

My incision is specific.
Penetrates
scalpel smooth,
cruises through moist warm
layers of flesh;
I spread
skin and pin it,
massage inside where you want me
to implant.
Your body pulses and throbs,
this system is circulatory.
 Do not mind my fingers
 this should not hurt
 I have been trained to beautify
 by the finest of men.

I've left permanent
scars,
made alterations,
depositions inside.
When your body decays
to a pile,
this silicon will remain
side by side underground
not far from your
wedding ring.

Jailbird

He remembered the pin-
up girl
hanging
in his basement bedroom
 hardened nipples
 mirrored in the paint
 job,
 high heels dangled over the front dash
 like fuzzy dice,
 she was licking the wind
 hot red.

Lying in his prison cell
the image would come to mind,
last thing he remembered
from outside
 could no longer see bars
 or hear conversations down the walk,
 wind lathered his head
 as he rode with the engine's purr
 open mouth drowning in heat.

Porcelain

Each night,
coffee table cluttered
by bottles
as drained as his face.
A sincere thought
trips off his tongue,
he scrambles to catch it
like a lit match
slurred to the floor by numb fingers.

Discussions spill
into arguments,
excuses flow through veins,
every day is old
 the window frame and door handle
 still broken
 their relation-
 ship unrepaired.
She sinks slowly,
his head pitches,
cracks heavy
against urine speckled porcelain
 convulsions echo in bathroom acoustics.

His apologetic,
stomach-acid kisses
curdle her emotions
heave memories
she used to dream.

Massaging Fingers

In Hamilton
at a polluted roadside patio
on Main
a man who was only drinking coffee
lured a clucking pigeon
by rubbing thumb with index
finger

 picked it up gently
 patted and rubbed its back
 cooed lullabies in hidden ears
 massaged closer to the head
 squeezed the neck
 and yanked.

Pigeon's head lay
on interlocking bricks
staring
stone eyes closed in-
to black
spine stuck out like a spring
where the head and neck used to be
 blood drained from its body
 with the slow pour of wine
 fanned over broken pavement
 toward my feet
 settled in a crack.

I had on a sweatshirt in July
stiff new jeans
couldn't finish my nachos
 a man wearing soiled gloves
 grey polyester
 and a sewed on name
 swept carcass and loose feathers
 like a burger
 into a pan
 pushed blood around
 with a wet mop.

Visiting Father

Thumb ripped
from my mouth as I descended into black,
wrist and forearm snagged
between dry wall and loose railing
 chunks of plaster fell
 from where I pulled on screws
 made white speckles on wooden stairs
 (I tried to sweep them
 on my way down).
Arched spine felt pinch
of stair edge
my head thwacked its way to the basement floor
 you stood at the top
 wiping your hands as if preparing
 to eat, your eyes
 were bloodstained
 butchers' aprons.
 These "accidents" did not happen
 before you split on mom.
 When you could not afford
 a house with stairs,
 railings, intricate weapons
 in the liquor cabinet.

My head leaked
blood,
dried and formed knots
in my hair
like your twirling fingers
weaving pain through my curls
while watching rented
movies.
You bounced me
on your liquid knee
rubbed dirty whispers
with oily fingers all over
my belly, legs, undeveloped
breasts.
Said I could not go
to emergency
or call my brother,
told me to say nothing
in the same tone my sister used in the sandbox:
"don't tell Mom."

ii

I called
the hospital
while you were taking a piss
on the toilet
 I can hear the difference in splash
 between water and porcelain
 especially when you leave the door open.
Paramedics came
an hour later
guess who was passed out on the sofa.
They looked at the purple and black mush
I had for an eye.
the split in my head
 it was easy to find.
 blood dried my hair together
 to mark the spot.

iii

I pictured you shaken
from the couch
stumbling slowly through the T.V. room
in briefs,
cracked shin off the coffee table
on your way to answer knocks at the door
 your mouth was thick with paste
 from a hang over so bad the scruff
 on your face burned like a rash.
You opened front door
to find police officers with a warrant,
stood in the bedroom and watched you,
hands and knees on the floor
searching for a decent pair of jeans.
 Blood trickled from my head
 slithered down my neck
 like drips from mom's cool wash cloth
 I could hear fading bleeps ping in soft corners of my skull,
 viewed the world in time lapse.

The Routine

The Routine

He tapped the same rhythm
every day for twenty years,
slapped a solo with his hands
on the identical spots
above his knees
until a tough leathery patch
was permanently formed.
His body grooved
to the rigid metronome
of his heart.

ii

The routine never improved
he did not try to cross
his hands over
experiment with quarter beats
or put words to his ritual.
Didn't hum melodies
or bang his chest
for bass notes.

iii

Drumming made the garbage
man visit his curb on Mondays,
mail man regularly
at 11:15 am;
bills went out the day
they arrived.

iv

His family could predict the future,
refused to be stage-
hands for only one
instrument.
They left his mono-
tone world,
lack of music
their heads skipping like a phonograph
harmonized with his life.

Returned for the funeral
sang hymns about journeys
through sand storms,
hung wind chimes
from his grave stone.

The Bird Feeders

Bird feeders tower over plum tomato plants,
hand crafted houses balance
on top of poles
driven deep
through layers of soil,
cemented for support
one and a half meters
below the frost line.

Although house and pole are made of wood,
humming bird feeders hang like apples,
structure does not have roots.

The Burnt Hand

My father burnt his hand
in a glass furnace
when I was five
never told me
how his fingernails curled back like shaved steel
face sucked with pain
eyeballs rolled into black
 they spun into his head
 as if he were trying to stare
 at his brain from inside
 to see what went
 wrong.

ii

My friends shrank into their jackets
at his hand on the wheel
steering to hockey
 he rotated the volume
 with the remainder of his thumb
 pressed defrost
 with stubs.
At the games his pats
on my helmet
made a knock.

iii

He gave away my sister,
pinkish mutation graced with gold
cuff links
made a bow on the back of her flowing
white dress.
Skin
layered together like a road patch
curled, deformed and clean.

Thoughts of a Nickel Miner

There is no river that flows
through town
no way out
except highways
without shoulders.
This town was not built
for the free-
ways, rail road or good soil.
I came here for coin
to drill for prospects
make something of nothing
raise children on rock.
I cannot even be buried
here.

Flying Ant

Mixing margaritas in the kitchen
sweltering afternoon
a flying ant landed on his shoulder
crawled up neck and in-
to left ear

before he felt anything

it was trapped in the canal
wings jammed along the edges,
started squirming
its sectioned body.
Feet tread viciously
on tiny fibres of hair.

Hand automatically smacked his ear
buzzing head flinched in spasms
eyes closed
spinning
cut a gash in his forehead
on the corner of an open cupboard.
He yelped.

No one knew
what was going on
as he cycloned through house,
ransacked the bathroom
for cotton swabs
could remember the stories
of spiders crawling into little boys' ears
spawning liquid eggs
into a bed of wax
later to hatch.

The Curved Eye

She had one eye,
the other covered
with a shiny silver patch
in which I could see my face.
Asked me to sit
ordered a draft
pulled a stool from the bar.

 I could tell where she was looking.
 Ceiling light hit metal, deflected
 off the bartender's scruffy face, change, knuckles rapping the counter,
 pool table, jukebox, men's washroom, my lap.

We met at a tavern
just outside Chatham
mid-afternoon,
supposed to be at work.

I stared at the patch
wondered if there was glass underneath
or a shaded hole
that got itchy inside,
then noticed the silver on her eye
was curved
distorting reflection
 as I leaned closer
 my face was a dot then expanded,
 like peeking through the eye of a door
 to see myself staring back.

One Drop of Blue

After twenty years of
microscopic perfection
he found a solar system in a skin
cell

 a layer from his forehead
 sectioned on a slide
 one drop of blue
 dye
 covered
 no air bubbles
 a beam of light
 shot through skin and layers of lenses
 to his brain
 (the planets spun in a swim
 suspended in plasma blue).

He envisioned our sun
as the nucleus of one cell
in something else's brain,
saw himself as a galaxy.

 His mind took off
 heading west against the speed of the earth
 locked in perpetual twilight
 never quite catching the sun.

Land Without a Sky

Land Without a Sky

Lost with each other
in the floral pattern of bed sheets
I gripped your bum cheeks tightly
with both hands
as we rode through wild prairie
heads popping occasionally
above sunflowers.

End of Day

Let me glorify your body
with my hands
lather your skin into bath water
 feel the penetration of heat
 loose muscles
 slide from your back
ribs release with a breath
float in the dream
of deep.

Rules for Dreaming

Palms

hold the rules for dreaming.

Surface lines intersect,

only dominant creases

read and measured

look at blue veins

under surface

cross love line

pass blood

deep from fingers

thick in your hands

up arms

satellite photo

of delta.

Trickery of Light

Through the slow movie of a dream
he returned to the cottage
where he used to spend summers
with friends.

His own private art work hung
along the walls,
paint still wet on some.

He was able to scoop flames in his hands from the fire-
place, roll them unscathed in the palms like weightless
meditation balls
until the silent blaze could be
unfurled and reclaimed
in smooth motions.

People
not seen
since high school
tapped at the cottage door,
brought bottles of their best wine,
side dishes on fine china, rich
desserts,

they had grown but their faces
stayed the same,
especially parts he remembered
that had nothing to do with the eyes or nose,
only the angle of wrinkles on their foreheads
and relaxed posturing of lips.

He shared the flame,
placed some gently in their hands
like butterflies,
invited them in;
"I missed you."

ii

He could pour wine and deal
cards with flames,
reach inside of his water
colours
and make a glowing sun.

His eyes zoomed in on fire,
stopped the frame,
noticed with a reeling eye
it was all trickery of light,
the flames and hands never touched,

their communion was an illusion.
The fire that joined them
began to snap,
turn hot,
sweep
up peoples' sleeves
and neck hair until
even the walls and paintings
were caught.

The Sleepwalker

He walked straight
out the front door
left it open.

wandered to the back field
 in his head it was daytime
 he could see
 through the country night
 by images mapped
 in his brain.

Wind blew
warm in his pyjamas
tall grass waved around him like a sea
 stars were out during his daylight,
 still,
 deer eyes
 lit up as if staring in car headlights.

He pulled flowers from dirt
watched white petals flap from his hands
felt their soft flicker
brush his palms.

 Owl eyes
 shone through tree branches,
 raccoons' from his garbage,
 kittens' beside the house,
 his own eyes illuminated
 pairs of glowing lights blended with stars
 a reversal of black and white,
 dream captured through negatives.

Wet to the waist with dew,
mud squished between his toes,
he dug fingernails into the ground
ripped weeds up from the roots
snatched worms
started eating
 they flipped along his chin and slapped his nose
 as he sucked them slithering between his lips
 mud clung to his moustache
until the porch light flashed with a voice,
drained sun from night.

The Neighbour

Noticed my elderly neighbour
had not been in his orchard
for weeks

 pictured him reclined,
 bottle of nitro pills spilt
 on his stiff lap
 mouth and eyes open,
 dried.

 T.V. blaring
 test pattern.

Walked hastily to the road
to check his mail,
see if he had been around,
 flag was halfway up.

Robin, toting a beak full
of worms
nudged its way under front flap
of the box

 waited till the bird left,
 opened.

 Three featherless chicks
 in a round nest
 exposed to light.

 Anxious mouths agape,
 chirping resonated in tin box,
 eyes the size of berries

 decorated centre of a bushy wreath.

Nervously I jogged to his front porch
where hanging plants had dried, shrivelled from sun,
soil cracked like the surface of an old painting.

Rang door bell
knocked on thick wood.

Bangs increased in frequency,
vigour - palpitations
of my heart -

tried to deny no one was home
 sound from my raps
 echoed off each wall of the house
 ricocheted in corners
 rebounded from ceiling
 to floor
 where he was lying
 hand open over heart,
 glass of water broken at his yellow feet.

Flowers for the Gardener

There is a man
who lets spiders
web him to his garden
allows moss growth
between his toes
hornets to nest in his hair.

His skin chaps with the sun
then cycles back to mud
sweet corn and tomatoes
ripen between his legs
larvae squirm from his ears
we carry him
flowers
he grins a seedy watermelon.

The Arrangement

She brought flowers
to her grandfather's grave,
pulled over,
dropped the arrangement
on a wet two lane highway
 approximately where his body was buried.
 Quickly crushed
 by a pick-up,
 petals spilt on pavement - splashes
 from a dropped palette.
Soon after, drove a kilometre and a half
down the road
to a symmetrical plot of sinking land
where contractors designated the tombstones.
Made sure his was still there.

In your head
ride the smooth revolutions of pages
smudge ink words to notes
feel your finger print erase.
Shrink into
your needle eyes
form a spiral
spin it until the tracks
with your finger
play this book backwards.

Vita Auctoris

Chris Kehoe was born in 1973 in Chatham, Ontario, Canada. He graduated from Ursuline College, Chatham in 1992. From there he continued his education at the University of Windsor where he completed a combined Honour's degree in English Literature and History in April, 1996. Chris remained in Windsor for another two years to complete course work for his Master of Arts in English Literature and Creative Writing and pursue a Bachelor of Education degree. He is currently a candidate for the Master's degree in English Literature and Creative Writing at the University of Windsor and hopes to confirm graduation plans in both Education and Creative Writing by Spring 1998.